

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-8

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At CIA: Badges and armed guards

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How tight is security at the secluded CIA headquarters in Langley?

It's so tight that government guards recently confiscated film from a photographer who was standing in the median of Route 123, taking pictures of the guardhouse.

It's so tight that guards in blue blazers and gray slacks line the entranceways during rare public events on the compound.

It's so tight that they won't even tell you how tight it is.

Security at the 22-year-old intelligence agency's headquarters is the most extensive of any building in Northern Virginia, even the Pentagon, local officials say.

Not surprisingly, CIA officials won't say much about security precautions taken at the 219-acre compound or in the agency's seven-story building. They won't say anything about any high-tech toys that are being used. They won't say how many guards work there (last year there reportedly was a shortage of 100 guards, though). They won't even say how many employees of all types work there.

"That information could help people working against us," said Kathy Pherson, director of CIA media relations.

Pherson will say that only agency employees showing badges and visitors with appointments to see employees are allowed past the gatehouses on Route 123 and the George Washington Parkway. Armed guards stand watch at the gatehouses.

The same restrictions apply for employees and for visitors who ride into the compound on the 5S Metrobus line.

Approved visitors driving in are directed to a parking area, then to a large foyer and a waiting room. Employees meet guests there and escort them around the building.

President Reagan attended groundbreaking ceremonies for a new building in the compound last year. Invited guests had to call in their names, Social Security numbers and car license plates in advance for clearance. They also passed through a metal detector before watching the ceremony.

Outsiders were not allowed to take pictures inside the compound during the ceremony. Neither were pictures allowed in 1983, when CIA officials held a meeting to talk about the new building with McLean residents.



Journal photo by Tracy Woodward

Sign on George Washington Parkway marks approach to CIA headquarters in Langley.